

The Independent Sector as Part of the Master Plan for Higher Education

Testimony by Jonathan Brown,
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Chairs Ruskin and Negrete McLeod, I am Jonathan Brown and am president of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities that represents the non-profit WASC accredited institutions in the state. The first colleges and universities in the state were independent; Santa Clara University and the University of the Pacific began in 1851. The first women in California who went to college did so at an independent college, Mills in 1852. When the first Master Plan was written Arthur Coons, then president of Occidental College, chaired the commission that created the plan. So our contributions to the educational fabric of California are long and deep.

We are a public resource, with our resources irrevocably dedicated to educational purposes but we are not governmental. And that makes our role different from our colleagues in UC, CSU and the Community Colleges. California's Constitution prohibits direct appropriations to our institutions. The only state resources for our sector come from the Cal Grant program – where students with a strong academic record and financial choose an independent college. Even there the relationship is one of partnership. Last year, students brought about \$250 million in Cal Grants to our institutions, we raised an additional \$1.3 billion to support undergraduates with financial need.

Because we do not receive direct state support it is easy to think only about the three public segments. But forgetting about the independents would be short-sighted. Collectively the 76 members of the Association provide 22% of the baccalaureates, half the graduate degrees and two thirds of the first professional degrees in the state. At 251,000 students we are larger than the University of California. We enroll and graduate more under-represented students than UC.

The independent sector is a flexible resource. In the last year, as the economy declined and endowments reduced in value, no independent college reduced their enrollments nor their commitment to institutionally funded student aid. As the stories about the challenges facing students in the public sector began to be understood many of our institutions have begun to offer general education courses for those students at a significantly reduced cost. We are also working with our colleagues in the community colleges to increase the number of transfer students that are able to attend an independent college.

The original Master Plan and its first couple of reviews have paid real benefits to the state. In the late 1980s and early 1990s as the country went through military base closings, and California took the largest number of reductions, the state's economy continued to grow into new areas. That was possible because of the investments we made for students from the first and second iterations of the Master Plan. Yet, current

trends are not promising. Last year was the first year that California spent more on prisons than higher education. It is not hard to figure out which is a more productive investment – Cal Grants or San Quentin grants.

In this iteration of the Master Plan the focus will be on a limited set of issues – eligibility and access, affordability, accountability and efficiency.

The core for us would start with access and affordability issues. We have made some progress in recent years with efforts like the American Diploma Project, but we need to do more. When only 11% of the Latino students in our high schools can expect to attend a four-year college or university, we are not assuring true access.

If we are to improve those numbers we need to have some creative thinking about defining a financing mechanism for students which assures them a reasonable set of options. That will require thinking about the appropriate price for attending a public campus. We think whatever policy is adopted that changes in the prices students pay should be gradual, moderate and predictable. At the same time, we need to assure that the Cal Grant program is an integral part of the financing strategy. We need to think about the appropriate level for maximum awards in each of the segments; the maximum for students in the independent sector has been the same since the beginning of the decade. Ultimately our goal for thinking about financing should be to offer the widest range of students the widest range of alternatives that will fit their needs.

The nature of independent colleges makes them different. They are public resources but not governmental ones. Thus, the appropriate accountability mechanisms for our sector are slightly different than would be expected for UC, CSU or the Community Colleges. We tried for several years to pass a statewide accountability bill, carried by then Senator Scott. It was a good approach thinking about institutional and system conformity to statewide goals. We think the approaches in that bill are a good place to start on accountability.

We've worked closely with our colleagues in UC, CSU and the Community Colleges and K-12 in producing a more coherent set of standards. The work of the Intersegmental Coordinating Council has been helpful but more needs to be done. We have some real opportunities if California is successful in becoming a state funded for the federal program Race to the Top.

We appreciate the willingness of the members of this committee to begin the process of reviewing the Master Plan for Higher Education and look forward to working with you during this review. The challenges to the state and to students and institutions are huge but if we do not respond creatively we are likely to look forward to a future where the state is known as Mississippi with earthquakes and that is not a future we should accept.